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SUBJECT: ELECTORAL COMMISSION PREPARATIONS FOR 2008 ELECTION

REF: 07 Accra 2599

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a January 16 meeting with Kwadwo Sarfo-Kantanka, Deputy Chairman of Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC), Sarfo-Kantanka said preparations for the election are going well and that the EC should begin to update the voter registers in March or April following the purchase of cameras to make voter ID cards. Despite a polarized political climate in Ghana, Sarfo-Kantanka expects a peaceful election, commenting that New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate Nana Akufo Addo's long-standing relationship with National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate John Atta Mills should help the parties maintain decorum during the campaign. Finally, despite EC research into the subject, Sarfo-Kantanka stated that there is little chance that overseas voting - a controversial issue in Ghana - would be implemented in time for the 2008 elections. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) POL Chief met January 16 with Sarfo-Kantanka, Deputy Chairman of the Ghana Electoral Commission in charge of Operations, to discuss preparations for the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, due to take place on December 7. Sarfo-Kantanka characterized preparations as positive, noting that the key challenge for the EC at this stage is updating voter registers to include potential voters who have turned 18 since the last election, and citizens who were not previously registered.

#### Updating Voting Registers

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13. (U) A key problem in updating the registers had been the fact that the Polaroid cameras previously used by the EC to produce voter ID cards have been made obsolete since the last election and film is no longer available. However, Sarfo-Kantanka said the EC has put out solicitations for new digital cameras and mobile workstations. The EC plans to purchase about 1600 digital cameras (NOTE: with approximately 21,000 polling stations in Ghana and an average of four polling stations per "electoral area," the EC will allocate roughly one camera/workstation for every electoral area. END NOTE).

14. (U) Once cameras and workstations are procured, and personnel trained in their use, the EC will begin revising the voter registers by replacing lost voter IDs. This will be followed by the registration of new voters in a separate exercise. The updating process should begin, according to Sarfo-Kantanka, in March or April. By the end of April, the EC hopes to have obtained the data for the registers, and in July it will exhibit the registers for corrections. The deadline to print final registers is November 26, and the vote is scheduled to take place on December 7.

#### Recruiting and Training Election Officials

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15. (U) Sarfo-Kantanka said the EC would hire approximately 100,000 temporary workers (approximately five per polling station) to assist with the election. Given the EC's experience managing four previous elections in Ghana, it plans to draw heavily from individuals who have worked in past elections and expects little difficulty with

this process.

¶6. (U) Nevertheless, Sarfo-Kantanka said recruitment and training of "returning" officers (officials responsible for overseeing the election returns at polling stations) would take place in mid-July. The EC will interview potential officers, and publish the names of these officials to provide the various political parties with an opportunity to object. The EC will have one returning officer and two deputies for each of Ghana's 230 parliamentary constituencies.

"Temperature" Rising, but EC Expects Peaceful Election  
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¶7. (SBU) Sarfo-Kantanka admitted that in Ghana's polarized political environment, the "temperature is rising" significantly as the election approaches. He said the EC plays an important role in attempting to diffuse this polarization, including through the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC). He admitted that the EC could do more to use this mechanism to reduce tension, and said the EC is looking at options.

¶8. (SBU) However, Sarfo-Kantanka noted that Nana Akufo-Addo, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate for President, and John Atta Mills, the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) were schoolmates, and said he expects them to conduct themselves "with decorum." He added that he expects the 2008 election to be peaceful. Despite NDC claims, he said, the system works well and "cannot be cheated."

NPP Congress  
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¶9. (SBU) Sarfo-Kantanka mentioned that he had supervised the voting at the NPP Congress that took place on December 22, 2007 to elect the party's presidential candidate, and was highly critical of the

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disorganization that disrupted the Congress. He said he almost removed EC personnel during the confusion that followed allegations of vote buying during the Congress by supporters of former Trade Minister Alan Kyerematen. This confusion held up voting for about one hour. (Reftel)

ROPAA and Overseas Voting  
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¶10. (SBU) With regard to the Representation of the People's Amendment Act, a controversial law that would allow Ghanaian citizens residing abroad to vote in Ghanaian elections, Sarfo-Kantanka said the EC had visited a number of countries, including the Botswana, the Netherlands, Philippines, South Africa, and Mali, to examine how those countries conduct overseas voting. Sarfo-Kantanka said the EC had "done a lot of work," to put together a regulatory framework for overseas voting that will soon be sent to Parliament.

¶11. (SBU) When overseas voting is implemented, Sarfo-Kantanka said the EC is proposing that Ghana's Embassies and diplomatic personnel play a central role. However, he noted that due to opposition concerns, the regulation would exclude political appointee ambassadors from the process, and instead confine voting administration to career diplomatic personnel.

¶12. (SBU) Sarfo-Kantanka noted that the EC budget for 2008 does not provide for overseas voting, and admitted that overseas voting will not occur for Ghana's 2008 election. However, he acknowledged that this has been controversial, and that the EC has carefully avoided public discussion of the issue. (NOTE: This has been strongly supported by the ruling NPP, but uniformly opposed by Ghana's opposition parties, who contend that the NPP will use overseas ballots to manipulate the election. END NOTE).

EC Budget  
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¶13. (U) In late 2007, Parliament approved GHC 36.8 million (about USD 38.7 million) for the EC in 2008 and recommended that the

government increase this amount. A Deputy Clerk of Parliament has informed us that discussions are taking place for a supplementary budget for the EC to be submitted to parliament soon. The government cut the original EC budget request by about 20 percent.

Comment

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¶14. (SBU) The delay in EC efforts to revise the voter registers has been a sore spot for opposition parties - particularly the NDC - who claim that previous registration lists undercounted voters in their strongholds. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that the EC is now moving forward with a timeline for registration and other preparations for the 2008 elections, and the EC appears confident that it will meet its deadlines. At this stage it is unclear how the budget shortfall will affect these plans, and what resources will be requested from foreign donors. END COMMENT.

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